Dossier: Media Space in Perspective

In order to supplement the full-length articles presented in this issue, we approached a number of well-known scholars working with the intersection of media, space, and architecture. We invited participants to address the ways in which media spaces are created; how spaces, places, and architectures have been represented; shifting ideas about geographies of cultural production; and the importance of space as an analytical construct for media and cinema studies. The scholars who answered our call—Miranda Banks, Michael Curtin, Nitin Govil, James Hay, Scott Higgins, Derek Kompare, Vicki Mayer, Lisa Nakamura, and Serra Tinc-—offer a wide range of insights touching on issues such as the geography and visibility of cultural labor; digitization and the reconfiguration of place; places of media production and spaces of decay; media mapping and mobility; the use of color in representing space; and racialized spaces in virtual environments. We hope that the reader will find this a thought-provoking and engaging collection of statements that complements and extends the concerns raised elsewhere in this issue.

Company Town: Production Communities and the Myth of a Unified Hollywood

Miranda Banks

Last year the voice of Hollywood went silent. Jack Valenti, Hollywood lobbyist and head of the Motion Picture Association of America for almost forty years, died at the age of eighty-five in Washington, D.C. Officially, Valenti spoke as the “voice of Hollywood” in Washington, but his prominence within the motion picture production community, his showmanship, his professional tenacity, and his eagerness to go on record for any reporter made Valenti (for better or worse) a national, even global, ambassador for Hollywood. For almost forty years Hollywood’s leading man lived and worked in Washington. I point to this geographical peculiarity as an apt entry into a discussion of how Hollywood—as both an urban space and an industry—has been redefining its visibility and its voice.

Ideas of what Hollywood is have changed in its almost hundred-year history. The district, which sits at the center of the city of Los Angeles, no longer holds within its boundaries a majority of the screen production industry, even of those sectors of the industry still headquartered in Los Angeles. Historically, many of the major motion picture production studios as well as ancillary industries of screen production—postproduction houses, costume warehouses, and lighting companies—were based in Hollywood. But today most screen productions (whether feature films, television series, television specials, commercials, or music videos) have dispersed into surrounding localities or beyond the confines of Los Angeles. Hollywood and Los Angeles have suffered from both national and global screen production sprawl. One hold Los Angeles still has on the inner workings of the industry is that the major production crafts unions are still based there: the Directors Guild of America (DGA), the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), the Producers Guild of America, the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), and the Writers Guild of America (WGA), as well as many locals of the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE) and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Though John Ford famously said, “Hollywood is a place you can’t graphically define. We don’t really know where it is” (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson xiii), what I wish to do here is do precisely that: examine, as it reaches its centenary, how Hollywood has represented itself by looking at specific examples of how individual union-based communities are represented and represent themselves geographically upon the landscape of the historic district.
bANDING together to form a unified voice of Hollywood that can, in turn, speak to the nation and the global media community.

Over the past ten years there has been a massive push to revitalize the geographic center of the district, Hollywood Boulevard, as a site from which Hollywood can be seen and heard. The exquisitely crafted Grauman’s Chinese and Egyptian theaters have been renovated. Every day at the Egyptian Theater the American Cinematheque screens the documentary *Forever Hollywood,* which, according to its 2007 website, celebrates a century of cinema and the “eternal allure of Hollywood,” documenting the story of the city’s transformation from farming suburb to “film capital of the world.” As well as reestablishing the Pickford Center for the Study of Motion Pictures just south of the famous corner of Hollywood and Vine, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has moved its annual Academy Awards ceremony to the newly built Kodak Theater on Hollywood Boulevard. In its architectural review of the Kodak when it first opened in 2001, the *Los Angeles Times* commented on how much this theater meant to the reestablishment of the idealized vision of Hollywood: “Sleazy beyond the call of duty and downright dangerous, [the theater] symbolized how far Hollywood had fallen. It felt like a place that had been abandoned by the world. . . . Finally, now Hollywood [is] coming home to Hollywood” (Whittle). In 2008 the Academy is hoping to break ground on a 75,000-square-foot multi-million-dollar Academy Museum next to the Pickford Center. With help from the Hollywood Redevelopment Project, part of the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles, grand attempts are being made to return the glamour associated with the myth of Hollywood to the streets of a district that was largely abandoned by the industry. While real estate is too pricey for new studios to be built within the area, these buildings help define Hollywood as the symbolic center of the industry. But the revitalization of Hollywood Boulevard speaks more to local entrepreneurial and conservatory efforts. Practitioners within the industry have their own reasons for using the cultural and historical cachet of the district to their advantage in order to prominently promote their guild.

While the Directors Guild of America has been situated at Sunset Boulevard’s western point of entry into the district of Hollywood for twenty years, in the past five years two more guilds have recently established and completed directives for prominent union buildings along the same strip of Sunset. The Motion Picture Editors Guild (IATSE Local 700) and the International Cinematographers Guild (IATSE Local 600) have built substantial new buildings, which they designed with the intent not just to house their guilds’ executives, administrative offices, and meeting spaces but also to serve as critical sites of visibility. Their new visibility and visible proximity to the Directors Guild building speak to their intention of gaining a more powerful voice within the industry. Another method unions and guilds are using to gain visibility is through promotional signage. In 2003 the Writers Guild of America West launched a billboard campaign in Hollywood and West Los Angeles not only in celebration of the guild’s seventieth year but with the clear intention of bringing literal visibility to the guild among particular Hollywood players. Marc Norman, the guild member who devised the campaign, said, “We wanted to change their minds a bit: here’s a line you know: Here’s the face of the writer. You should know who this is—and if you don’t, you oughtta make it your business to find out” (Jarvis). William Goldman, Academy Award–winning screenwriter of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and one of the first writers chosen for the campaign, stated his hope for the series of billboards: “Everybody always thinks that all the directors have the visual concepts and the actors make up all their lines. There is such an ignoring of the craft of screenwriting that anything that calls attention to it is a big help” (Jarvis). By prominently branding these buildings and billboards within well-trafficked areas in the center of the city, the guilds hope, through visual perception, to define their role in the public, not just professional, discourse on the industry.

In many ways Hollywood as an industrial system, as a cultural force, and even as an entertainment community floats above the streets of Los Angeles. Within the context of intensifying globalization and complex economic imperatives from corporate conglomerates who run the industry from the outside, very little of what constitutes Hollywood in our cultural, economic, and historical imaginary still exists under the sign of Hollywood. Given these industrial, economic, and professional shifts, there has been a loss of localism. I believe Hollywood is both durable and adaptable: while the one voice is gone, a multiplicity of voices is emerging to tell a more complex tale of a mythic place where culture and economy collide.
Much of the commentary regarding popular music eventually circles back to the ways in which digital piracy is eroding the creative, cultural, and economic substance of the medium. But if we shift our attention from property relations to spatial relations, it brings into focus a number of ways in which the digital era is perhaps a more music-friendly place than commonly imagined.

Chris Anderson, editor of Wired magazine, argues that the “long tail” of digital distribution gives us more and better choices because it overcomes the tyrannies of space. It used to be that brick-and-mortar music stores had to worry about which products to put in their display racks, since space was limited and rent was expensive. As a result, they opted for titles that moved out the door in a reliable flow, which meant that Brazilian samba suffered by comparison to Top 40 pop. Sure, some stores became renowned for stocking all the obscure stuff we love, but those stores were often located far from where most of us lived, and so we had to make periodic pilgrimages in search of NRBQ and Bonzo Dog Band. These days you don’t have to leave Manitowac to search, sample, or purchase Celia Cruz or Ali Farka Toure. There they are on iTunes, Amazon, and Yahoo. Even obscure indie performers like Greg Klyma are only a few clicks away on MySpace. Both the spatial constraints of the record store and the distribution infrastructure of the music business have been dramatically transformed.

Digital services also alter the ways in which we navigate the labyrinthine connections among music products, providing multiple pathways through the music and to the artists. It used to be that promotion and mass marketing drove consumers to artists and albums that industry insiders selected. Today, savvy distributors have reimagined their mission. Instead of leading the masses to the music, they try to make the increasingly diverse universe of options intelligible and accessible. They think more like librarians than carnival barkers. Librarians understood from the very beginning of the digital revolution that they needed to come up with browsing software that would replicate the serendipitous exposure one enjoys (or used to enjoy) negotiating the stacks of the library. They understood that title, author, and keyword searches alone were insufficient. Spatial proximity mattered in the stacks, and it matters in the online browsing world, especially because of the expansive range of choices now available. The race among distributors today is to develop more meaningful ways to aggregate and display (i.e., to spatially represent) search results.

Touring has once again become an important aspect of the popular music scene, restoring the status of copresence, improvisation, and audience engagement. The importance of live performance has grown as album sales have shriveled, so that top performers now generate more income on the road than in the studio. Farther down the musical food chain the value of live performance is increasing as well. Groups provide online updates of their bookings as well as concert videos, paraphernalia sales, and fan discussion. At the center of it all is the live performance, an irreplaceable experience that engenders enthusiasm and affinity among fans. Groups like Disco Biscuits and Brazilian Girls are renowned for memorable sets they performed in particular places at specific times. Digital media are, in unexpected ways, helping to reenchant the spaces of live performance.

Finally, we are now using digital technologies to provide alternatives to the musical formats piped into cars, shops, and a host of public spaces. Portable devices allow us to mix our own music, turning these sites into more meaningful places. In some ways it’s sad that commercial radio is dying and that we’re no longer grooving in unison to the top of the pops, but I find that food shopping, bicycle commuting, and airline travel are a hell of a lot more enjoyable. Perhaps my solipsistic aural pleasures isolate me from the “authentic” soundscapes of everyday places, but let’s face it, many of those places are filled with noise pollution. My vision of hell is the Sunday morning I found myself trapped at the Charlotte airport, desperately searching for a quiet corner that was immune from the pervasive drone of Wolf Blitzer on CNN. Now I travel fully armed with a TV power zapper, an iPod, and a pair of Etymotic headphones. Wolf Blitzer be damned.
Although piracy is indeed a problem for the music industry, more substantial challenges are posed by the shifting spatial dimensions of popular music. The industry’s future rests as much on its ability to adapt to and take advantage of these changes as it does on the successful containment of music piracy. At the level of strategy this is the fundamental difference between Apple and the major music conglomerates. Apple gets it.

Where Did the Televisions Go?

Nitin Gavil

Despite its ubiquity as a leading technological indicator, propelled by popular wisdom, media industry rationale, and the promise of a user-generated-content revolution, “convergence” resists definition because it is both a signifier for change and a guide to material transformations. Compounding this expository difficulty is the fact that convergence is a kind of conceptual black hole, a term whose density and singularity pull everything else into and around its own warped space-time. Think of the ways in which the telephone, novel, newspaper, cinema screen, computer, camera, and television have disappeared—though never without protest—into the (radiation-emitting) mobile hand-held device. As map and metaphor, convergence is a sort of gravitational center whose own existence—like a black hole—can be verified only through the examination of the concepts, artifacts, and practices that accrete and circulate around it.

Convergence has radically altered our experience and discussion of media-space, but technocratic conceptions of television as a transitional screen seem frozen in time, hypostasized at the horizon of the event, and fundamentally incapable of rendering either the sharp inequalities of change or the continuities with the past. And while the rumors of television’s burial in the black hole of convergence have been greatly exaggerated, accounts of its disappearance have become central to the presumptions that support our contemporary academic inquiry. This is a short accounting of television’s “demise” as well as an argument for its disinterment.

In the process of becoming, assimilating, devolving, or converging (pick your favored Cronenbergism—“merging” works just fine for the media industries, thank you!), the space of television has become ever harder to locate, disarticulating into billboards, cell phones, refrigerators, gasoline pump terminals, tabletops, windshields, dashboards, airplane seatbacks, surgical implements, smart bombs, gun sights, and bellies (Teletubbies, thank you all!). This might even explain why the television has ceded its altarlike centrality in the living rooms of some U.S. television academics we know; goaded perhaps by an onslaught of Pottery Barn catalogs and HGTV into thinking that a mantled façade fronted by brightly colored candles of varied height is a “tasteful” replacement for the television set. That the electronic hearth has been replaced by a boarded-over fireplace is no small irony.

Extensive anecdotal research—an emergent evidentiary paradigm that I hope will catch on—suggests that televisions have left some of our living rooms altogether. Televisions are now showing up in our offices, a migration that testifies to their seriousness as objects of study as well as soothing our anxieties about studying things we actually like, an indulgence that runs counter to Protestant fears of conspicuous consumption as well as fifty years of exquisitely funded social science research that has claimed all pleasure in watching television to be a guilty one. In recent years some academics have confessed to the blogosphere that they don’t like television and don’t watch it very much, but for those of us who do love TV, the office television reminds us that spectatorship is work (Nielsen has known this all along) and that watching TV is a form of cultural labor, albeit one that we hope to get paid for in tenure if not in treasure.

But the greatest indictment of the incessant, depoliticized, dromological hype of media convergence is its utter failure in acknowledging the existence of those very real places where televisions are born and where they go to die. The proliferation of “special economic” or “export-processing” zones in emerging markets across the global South, essentially spatial exemptions from national labor and safety laws, has fueled the cheap manufacture of new television screens, from two-inch cell phone displays to eighty-inch plasma units. Built on the violent displacement of rural populations, forcible eviction, and state-sanctioned land acquisition, these zones are the spatial legacy of post–World War II developmentalist modernity. As structural adjustment and privatization have transformed national economies on a global scale, we have seen the growth of new forms of inequality such as the extraction of heat-conducting metallic ores like coltan, used in the production of capacitors in cell phones, game consoles, and DVD players and heavily mined by Congolese militias using child and slave labor.
In 2005 130 million cell phones were discarded in the United States alone, which saw a daily obsolescence rate of over 160,000 computers and televisions; government researchers estimate that 75 percent of all computers ever sold in the United States remain in material circulation if not in use (check your closets, storage units, and garages). Fifty to eighty percent of electronics waste collected for recycling purposes in the western United States is exported to Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, where cathode-ray tubes bleed lead into the groundwater. The worldwide production of e-waste is estimated at between 20 and 50 million tons per year; creating new economies of scale in the extraction of revenue from toxic electronic trash.

Over 100,000 workers in Guiyu, in southern China’s Guangdong province, work to strip old computers of resalable parts. Remnants are freely dumped into the surrounding countryside, where mercury and barium leach into the local water table and plastics are burned in the open. There are numerous e-waste dumps in the Philippines, Mexico, Thailand, and Nigeria, where, in the Ikeja Computer Village near Lagos, most of the 540-foot containers filled with electronics shipped from the United States and the United Kingdom are being dumped to fill in nearby wetlands.

Television is lost in space but buried in place, and we need to be paying a lot more attention. In so much of what we do, what is on-screen still trumps accounts of how the screen gets assembled and taken apart. But the repurposing of TV programming is predicated on the recycling, or what environmental advocates call the “demanufacture,” of the material object. This idea of recursion is fundamental to the spatiality of media convergence. So the next time you are caressing the slick surface of your mobile device, lulled by the roulette-like clicking of the virtual scroll wheel (Apple’s U.S. patent no. 20060026535, in case you want to play the numbers), spare a thought for television, the dearly and nearly departed. At any rate, as in most games of necromancy, the safe bet is on black.

Outside Media: Toward a Study of Watching Ourselves through Mobile Media

James Hay

Before turning to present projects about “new media,” allow me to turn back briefly to the past and to the assumptions and dispositions shaping historical accounts of media. Few readers of the Velvet Light Trap would argue about the importance of historical perspectives in counteracting the “presentism” of recent studies about “new media.” The longer the history of new media, the better. Not only has this presentism been bolstered by the dominance of studies of “new media” through social and behavioral sciences, but the current “research university” (as the model of “academic excellence”) values the new over the old—and “new media” as an avenue for research funding. Few readers of this journal would disagree that historicizing media practices offers media studies a way to consider the failures of media research and development, communication research’s ongoing narrative of progress, or the messiness of squaring emergent or dominant media practices with residual ones. For “critical” studies of media these considerations potentially open onto political questions and perspectives.

However, it is not enough to say simply that studies of media (at any time) require historical perspectives. Historical analysis involves certain strategies that seem possible and plausible for those working in certain research fields at particular times. There are fairly entrenched dispositions in media studies about how one studies history. For decades genre studies (following structuralist theory) looked for the formal conventions shaping the emergence of new forms. Or media studies pegged the formal conventions of media representation to a “mode of production” understood narrowly as the organization of media industries. In either case, media history is primarily about the relatively discrete history of media or a specific medium. For media studies “media” become the lens for explaining the world, and proceeding that way too often implies that there is nothing outside media.

Over the 1980s and 1990s some “cultural studies” of popular media emphasized the importance of an analysis that put media into the production of social relations and that understood the making or production of media as dispersed through daily life and as historically situated. Arguably, some of the most trenchant and influential interventions came from Tony Bennett, whose Bond & Beyond (1987, with Janet Woollacott) and Outside Literature (1991) encouraged literary, media, and cultural criticism to recognize not simply what lay beyond or outside the text but that the production of texts, readings, and their political possibilities (including those produced by critical readings) are always “situated” through specific synergies and attachments of industries, texts, and readers. Through
the writing of Antonio Gramsci and his followers such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, some of the best cultural studies of media emphasized how media matter through “historical conjunctures.”

The project of situating media, however, tended to emphasize historical rather than spatial questions. And when “critical” media studies turned their attention to spatial questions, they have pertained mostly to media representations of place or, conversely, to the geographic “capitals” of media industry. While these trends are still very much in play in media studies and in studies of media history (particularly from the United States), it is worth reflecting briefly on Henri Lefebvre’s famously ambiguous expression “the production of space”—a dialectical view of space as both produced and productive. Lefebvre’s discussion of how space is produced was noteworthy because it addressed economic as well as cultural determinations—the familiar Marxist distinction between base and superstructure and (in France during the 1960s and 1970s) the debate between Marxist political economy and a Marxist structuralism. His view and his intervention into Marxist theoretical debates was novel because he viewed space as productive (a critical determination) of economies, systems of representation, social relations, and history. In this sense his account of the production of space offered nothing short of an alternative to the dualistic view that economy and culture were the primary forces of history, that economy and culture were separate historical determinations, and that space was the opposite of history. Space is not a static arrangement but continually in a process of formation (although one that increasingly has contributed to the emergence and transformation of capitalism and scientific rationalities). As historically lived, practiced, produced, organized, and determined, space is socially specific and a provisional formation or arrangement; history is “made” on a terrain that has been organized and lived spatially. In all these respects Lefebvre recast Marxism’s emphasis on “historical materialism” as a spatial materialism (Hay, “Between Cultural Materialism” and “Toward a Spatial Materialism”).

In underscoring the multiplicity of determinations and forms of spatial practice, Lefebvre devoted considerable attention to “spaces of representation,” and he recognized that space “mediated” and operated as “mass medium” or “mass communication.” His writing thus provides a framework for thinking about “the production of media space.” However, he also rightly eschewed the modern tendency to differentiate kinds of space (i.e., “media space” or “cultural space” as entirely extractable from other spatial practices and production). Because space is produced in multiple and socially or historically specific ways, media space needs to be understood as produced through multiple spatial practices (overdetermined) and as one of many determinant conditions for “making history.”

While Lefebvre offers one starting point for developing a spatial materialism of “new media,” there is another consideration that is not particularly pronounced in his writing but that is salient to thinking about current media practices: the relation between the technologies of communication and transportation, particularly in relation to “mobile media.” As Raymond Williams famously pointed out, TV’s emergence was not merely the outcome of an evolution of communication technologies but was part of a widespread regime of mobility and privacy—what he referred to as “mobile privatization.” From Williams’s perspective, TV developed and mattered not only through a particular conception and design of house and home (the most private of spaces) but through a home life that assumed and required particular forms of transport—and, likewise, through forms of transport that required a particular model of domesticity. Following Williams (as well as related arguments by Armand Mattelart and James Carey), my intervention in this forum emphasizes that the “long history of new media” is just as much a history produced by and through space, transport, travel, mobility, houses, cars, trains, clothes, and refrigerators as it is a history of communication “media” and their industries and cultures. The link between communication and transportation is particularly important in recognizing that televisuality has always been about overcoming the problem of distance through technologies of transport. The uses of the automobile during the 1940s (a privatized moving image accompanied by radio music) contributed just as powerfully to the subsequent uses of television as did the movie theater or the radio in the home.

A spatial materialist understanding of new communication/media, however, can easily become nothing more than an acknowledgment that “space matters” if it is not articulated through a view of mobility and transport as historically central to current strategies for exercising freedoms and control. I have considered how mobile privatization pertained (in Foucauldian terms) to the governmentalization and biopoliticalization of domestic space, media space, or technologies of transport in late modernity. And this is not such a wild appropriation of
Foucault, since he emphasized the relation between the government of liberties and the refinement of "technics of space," particularly communication and transportation networks. From this latter perspective, TV emerged and developed as a technology of governance, control, and securitization integral to exercising mobility and privacy. To understand televisuality's changing power, effectivity, and mattering one needs to begin by understanding how it has both problematized and contributed to the techniques for managing and safeguarding spheres of privacy (e.g., the design, daily enactment, protection, and running of households) that developed in relation to other spheres of activity and in conjunction with practices for moving among these spheres. How, in this sense, has the televisual developed as both a domestic and a mobile "technology of self"? And how has the televisual's regimes of privacy and mobility shaped spheres of self-government and citizenship such as the home and the car?

Today TV (or at least the video monitor) is everywhere. "Television" no longer refers just to the home-based TV set, and TV's ubiquity outside the domestic sphere has contributed to significant transformations in the physical environment of daily life (McCarthy). Part of TV's dispersion across various spheres of activity has involved its portability and its attachment to technologies of transport. What is needed, therefore, at this current stage of televisuality are studies that consider how the televisual is being reinvented through a new ("neoliberal") governmental rationality—one that emphasizes the government of the fully mobile self (or what Jeremy Packer and I have described as "auto-mobility") and that plays out across a new sociospatial arrangement (a new stage of mobile privatization) that expects citizens and consumers to manage their lives and to conduct themselves (to "watch themselves") through a new regime of personalized mobile televisual technologies.

Examples include the connection among recent self-monitoring technologies for the house, car, and sites outside the home and recent interactive instructional venues oriented toward maximum self-reflection and self-awareness as one moves through daily life. Collectively, these examples pertain to how televisuality's long-standing relation to the home has now been recast into an emerging expectation about acting/behaving as if one were at home away from home and to an environment wherein one must always verify one's belonging (one's access, membership, and citizenship) as one moves.

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**Color Accents and Spatial Itineraries**

**Scott Higgins**

The impact of color on production of a coherent cinematic space deserves a detailed study well beyond the limits of this essay. Here I want to sketch the contours of one particular issue, the ability of color accents within a verisimilar composition to affect our attention to space. With the advent of reliable natural-color cinematography in the 1930s, Hollywood designers, cinematographers, directors, and technicians worked to bring the new element in line with craft norms for representing space and directing attention. Where color was deemed a threat to classical standards of legibility and coherence, it was carefully controlled. For instance, filmmakers monitored compositions for unwanted color contrasts, sometimes termed visual magnets, that might vie for attention with the narratively salient details of a scene. Within a few years the body of conventions for regulating color's function as a spatial cue had been widely adopted (Higgins). The most general guideline was that background information should be carried by cool colors of low saturation, leaving warm, saturated hues for the foreground. Narrative interest should coincide with the point of greatest color contrast. The practice accorded with the still widely held view in the arts and design that

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**Works Cited**


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cool colors recede while warm colors advance toward the viewer, but it spoke to the more basic perceptual fact that accents, or isolated points of color contrast within a restricted palette, will ineluctably draw attention. With this principle in place, color would perform as an adjunct to more central spatial cues such as diminution, contour, lighting contrast, and depth of field. All of which is to say that color was assigned a relatively low rank in the hierarchy of visual cues that define cinematic space.

Norms, however, are a baseline for innovation, and we can learn about the role of color in cinematic space from filmmakers who promote it up the hierarchy for particular effects. Highly stylized color designs that trade shading, depth, and the cool-warm distinction for fields of strong, contrasting hue could radically challenge spatial legibility, but these options remain relatively rare. Musical numbers like the "Polka-Dot Polka" in The Gang's All Here and modernist experimentation like Jean-Luc Godard's chromatic mise-en-scène in Pierrot le fou are exceptions that prove the rule. The deployment of color accents, however, affords a means for intervening in cinematic space without flouting verisimilitude or coherence. In the classical era Vincente Minnelli and Douglas Sirk, both color-conscious directors, delighted in complex organizations of contrast that could challenge attention. When Minnelli staged a scene of elaborate action, he could array strong saturated accents across the frame and keep them in continual motion. The carnival sequence of Some Came Running, the shoeshine number in The Bandwagon, and the "Skip to My Lou" dance in Meet Me in St. Louis present constantly evolving sets of color relationships that draw the eye through space. Remarkably, Minnelli's mosaic designs help reinforce the central narrative action, but they do so in a perceptually demanding way. As Fred Astaire moves through the 42nd Street arcade, passersby motivate red, blue, and yellow accents that variously contrast and harmonize with his foreground dance. The eye passes through space from one color highlight to another but is almost inevitably guided back to the star performer. For a simpler but more concrete example consider Sirk's color design for Broadway producer Dave Edwards's (Dan O'Herlihy's) apartment in Imitation of Life. Like Minnelli, Sirk uses chromatic accents to create spatial itineraries for the spectator's eye. The establishing shot on this cool gray set reveals a series of Christmas gifts with bright red bows that stretch from the right foreground to the background center of the composition. When Edwards blocks a red accent in the background, his red necktie takes its place. As often happens in Sirk's melodramas, color ornaments are peculiarly emphatic. The red accents activate the background plane and link it to the fore in a graphic pattern that persists even as characters move in the space. While the arrangement does not impede legibility, it demonstrates the power of color to shape our awareness of a cinematic space. Certainly, the standard visual cues are at work in defining the depth of the apartment, but color grants it a presence not available to black and white.

Minnelli and Sirk exploit color's power to connect and segregate portions of the frame, a power that classical convention sought to check. Color theorist and artist Augusto Garau, developing Rudolf Arnheim's observations in Art and Visual Perception, argued that color harmonies can challenge figural unity when hues attract or repel one another within a composition. According to this view, in striving for balance the eye spontaneously seeks out and links complementary colors, creating tensions and unities. The basis of this claim is open to question, but the observation is correct: color accents prove capable of complicating if not subverting our perception of space. Where the reigning style centered color difference on the key action, Minnelli and Sirk multiplied contrasts and convergences to create dynamic structures that organize our attention to cinematic space. Generally, the effect amounts to a controlled dispersion of attention away from the scene's conventional narrative center. Normative warm-cool distinctions actually make the colored accents more perceptible, helping the spectator engage with the chromatic trajectories laid out by the accents. Such accent-driven visual itineraries function thematically in the artifice-laden melodramas of Sirk and Minnelli, as a source of perceptual play in Minnelli's musical numbers, as emotional motifs in Wong Kar Wai's In the Mood for Love, and more purely parametrically in Robert Bresson's color work. In each case color accents cue us to perceive and explore cinematic space in a way that exceeds the potentials of black and white.

In the past decade digital intermediate technology has given filmmakers unprecedented power to manipulate discrete colors in postproduction. In the great majority of cases this new flexibility has been used to apply large-scale "looks" to feature films (as in O Brother Where Art Thou, The Aviator, and 300) or to invisibly adjust color continuities. The possibility remains open, however, to reinvigorate accent-driven play and to extend color's complication of space. Indeed, a greater degree of precision may accompany the shift in color control from the director's chair to the
colorist's computer suite. If so, the tradition sketched here may gain new force and presence. Accents can be powerful cues to complicate and engage our perception of film space without straying far from the norms of verisimilitude.

Note

1. Recent research by Stephen Palmer's visual perception lab at UC Berkeley suggests that we view similar rather than complementary colors as harmonious. See “Aesthetic Science: Understanding Preferences for Color and Spatial Composition,” http://videolectures.net/google_palmer_colors/.

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Remapping Media and Media Studies

Derek Kompare

As this issue of the Velvet Light Trap has examined, space is an important, though neglected, characteristic of media and media studies. Space is both conceptual and geographical, connecting theory to physical practice and experience. It is also one of the key concerns of twenty-first-century media culture, as spaces of cinematic exhibition have moved from the theater to the living room to the personal media player, spaces of serial narrative proliferate across multiple media forms, and spaces of reception have become online networks of collection, creation, and critique. Alongside this reorganization of media space, the traditional domains of academic space (e.g., the journal article, the conference paper, the academic department) are struggling with change as well and beginning to incorporate more interactive and vernacular spaces (e.g., online journals, blogs, academic social networking). As any TV schedule grid or scholar's vita displays, all of these spaces are in constant flux, with the accreted remnants of older spaces and practices mixing up (or holding out) with the new. Whether or not these changes are embraced or feared, it is clear that in order to participate in cosmopolitan twenty-first-century culture, we have to exist in and move through these hybrid spaces.

That said, movement is one thing, navigation quite another. In order to purposefully move through and among spaces we need maps. Thankfully, as indicated by the likes of Google Earth, GPS-equipped phones, and Web 2.0 architecture, this is an era not only of maps but of mapping: the dynamic, decentralized, and collaborative construction and navigation of spaces real, virtual, and conceptual. Mapping has always been an apt metaphor for media and cultural studies, recognizing the ongoing processes of discovery and connection yet retaining a sense of established territories and boundaries. Accordingly, it’s a particularly useful metaphor to make sense of our current moment of dynamic change.

In my remapping of media studies, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century we are no longer in a digital “transition”; we have arrived. Indeed, the word “digital” is increasingly redundant, as few components of media production, distribution, and reception can still be described as “not digital.” Even our most prominent “analog” media—print publications and theatrical film exhibition—are almost entirely digital at most stages of their production. Even so, it is difficult, at this moment, to fully make sense of what “digital” means, of “where” we now are. The maps we have had en route to this location, produced in the ferment of twentieth-century speculation by cartographers ranging from Arnheim to Negroponte, are justifiably influential but now seem incomplete. Indeed, the key media and cultural practices they chart are largely products of nineteenth-century capitalist logic, which only came to maturity in the twentieth century. They are accounts of how we arrived rather than maps for future exploration. Our current terrain defies those earlier geographies and poses new questions (as well as re-poses old ones) about the relationships between media, culture, and society.

How should we map this new terrain? The 2007–08 strike by the Writers Guild of America (WGA) offered a particularly critical example of contemporary remapping. The strike, as with other previous creative labor struggles in Hollywood, occurred at a pivotal industrial intersection of production and reception, as the former continues to change to meet the new demands of the latter. While the familiar space (and familiar fictional spaces) of scripted prime-time television emptied during the strike, adjoining spaces of production and reception became hubs of activist remapping. Spaces of reception, such as online media fan communities, became spaces of labor activism,
where fans gathered to strategize with and for the striking writers. Moreover, these virtual spaces were re-created at the physical spaces of Los Angeles and New York studio gates and corporate foyers as fans joined writers on the picket lines. Given that the primary commitment generally demanded from the television industry has only been for our “eyeballs” (e.g., at 8:00 P.M. Thursday nights), as abstracted from ratings data, it is certainly significant that many viewers offered their time, money, and even bodies to support the writers of their favorite shows in their struggle to claim a greater stake in the new media geography.

Similarly, the broader maps of new media spaces, as we know them thus far, reveal continuously shifting boundaries between production, distribution, and reception, so much so that even these entrenched terms seem inadequate. Films, and especially television programs, are no longer texts (or even “products”) destined for one or even two or three screens and formats but have been repackaged as “content” to be poured across conceivably infinite platforms and networks. Thus, conceptual spaces that were seemingly known (e.g., broadcast television), with engrained practices and routes, have become mysterious and contentious. Transmedia storytelling has exploded the boundaries of the already unstable text, generating modes of narrative exploration that were marginal only two decades ago. Extratextual media, including writer blogs, podcast episode commentaries, and other behind-the-scenes materials, complicate the parameters of textual production. The massive and diverse creative output of vibrant online fan communities challenges long-held assumptions about reception and audiences. As Amanda Lotz reminds us, the recent changes in what constitutes “television” demand nothing less than “a fundamental reassessment of how it operates as a cultural institution” (5).

While new maps are clearly needed for our new spaces, the intrigue of these new territories should not prevent us from questioning the constructions of the ostensibly familiar spaces of media history. In Remni Nation I suggested that the apparent logic of a cultural moment is never the complete picture. In that case the privileged historical space of prime-time network television was only one component of a larger industrial logic of repetition played out on local schedule grids (Kompare 8–xi). Established histories are always partial, and similar recent explorations have greatly enhanced our understanding and remapping of media’s past moments of change. Ideally, we should continue to revisit our past, present, and future, keeping the boundaries of media studies itself in perpetual flux and continuously remapping our media spaces.

Notes

1. The parameters of the known and unknown have become a particularly intense battlefront, as in the dispute over how much revenue is, and will be, generated from sponsored streamed episodes on networks’ websites.


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Where Production Takes Place

Vicki Mayer

Over the last two decades the new economy for film and television has become so expansive that while we see the convergence of these media, its personnel, and its texts with those in other industries, some observers predict cinema and TV will disappear into an omnipresent video culture of the future. In the meantime, though, production studios and broadcast networks, and its attendant scholars, tell us that television production is a privileged activity managed by a few corporations, mostly located in Hollywood and steered by a handful of key creative professionals. So where does production take place?

To speak about television set manufacturing in the Brazilian Amazon in front of a number of media studies audiences has seemed to break a number of taboos in our field around the study of production and its cultural geography. For one, media studies has traditionally overlooked industrial workers as producers, and, given the symbolic hierarchies associated with titular taxonomies, I can see why. We don’t want to collapse the real power
differentials between the person who produces The Wire with the person who connects wires. At the same time, as we have come to look at the expanding political economy of production and its capillary reach into more labor markets, new industries, and a greater number of places, production studies have implicitly become concerned with spaces outside of the Hollywood set, the BBC studio, or even the field site for indigenous video production. In this new economy for production I submit that we must reconceptualize not only where media production takes place generally but also whose labor there matters to us.

In my work the pursuit of producers, that is, people whose labor contribute to the production of audiovisual media, has taken me far afield of the locations we tend to associate with production: the studio set, the editing room, the corporate office, the location shoot. Instead, I spent several months living in Manaus, Brazil, which is the heart of the Amazon but also part of the circulatory system for the manufacture and distribution of virtually every electronic good and communication technology in the Americas. My argument has been that the economic power that U.S. media scholars locate in Hollywood and the political power that they locate in Washington, D.C., exist in, indeed rely on, the geographies of manufacturing, technology research and development, and distribution.

Industrial districts exist in virtually every urban area across the globe. In film and television not only does the production of digital technologies and electronics in these districts precede the financial investments in content elsewhere, but the two processes are mutually dependent. On the front end of production activities studio budgets depend on access to cheaper tools, from the high quality cameras that drive down the costs of content creation to the postproduction gadgets that make effects easy to outsource to workers on the other side of the world. On the back end of production activities producers pay attention to the release and marketing of consumer technologies. Advertisers invest heavily in creative content for World Cup Games, knowing that their consumers are more likely to be watching on their new television receivers purchased especially for the event. This is how I take Bruno Latour’s insight into the embedding of technology in actor networks. It’s not that manufacturing forms some point of origins for production studies but that media scholars need to consider how technology production abroad mediates relations between social actors at home.

A new cultural geography of production in media studies would not only expand our repertoire of locations but allow us to look at the location of production in relation to labor markets, capital flows, and global politics of enfranchisement. Beyond center and periphery models of global cultural production, we can see how each city fosters its own ecology of production with parallel and often mutually dependent sets of industrial districts, distribution chains, and content creation hubs. Each setting fosters its own social hierarchies but also contributes to the economic and symbolic capital of those possessive individuals who have been able to monopolize the moniker “producer” as their own. Ultimately, I believe it will be the place of citizens to reclaim their roles as producers—as contributors to these production activities in these various locations—that will make Hollywood less a metonym for media production and more a node in a larger map of struggles.

Neoliberal Space and Race in Virtual Worlds

Lisa Nakamura

In World of Warcraft race must be chosen from a limited range of options. Each race, such as Orc, Troll, Night Elf, or Gnome, comes with its own backstory, body type, set of abilities, and skin color choices as well as a unique spatial relationship with the game. Each race is located within its own distinctive navigable space or discursive homeland or place of ancestral origin, such as The Den, Stranglethorn Vale, or Gnomeregan. As Alex Galloway writes, “One cannot ‘play’ race in WoW. One must accept it as such” (96). Though the races are fantastic, they possess unchangeable and distinctive traits and abilities, thus reinscribing the notion of race as instrumentally linked to the body. Tauren have better racial stats for health; Undead have better underwater breathing abilities; Dwarves are resistant to frost. Race is segmented into discrete categories that are balanced with each other so as not to provide advantages that would cause players to always choose one over another (Yee 3–4). Movement itself is racialized within the game, since each race starts out in a distinctive space, and experience points are awarded for “discovering” a new area of the virtual world by navigating to it successfully. And since quests are the primary way to advance in the game, the goal of resource and status accumulation must occur through this successful navigation through racialized and nationalized space. A player can only advance in a
manner consistent with his or her racial identity as scripted by Blizzard's arrangement of virtual space, space that must be moved through in real time. Indeed, many of a noob's tedious early days in the game are spent running around in circles, checking maps, or otherwise contending with the difficulties of navigation.

In contrast, race is composable in Second Life: all races have the same abilities, and one can create hybrid races, an impossibility in World of Warcraft. However, there are social advantages to being white in-game. As Destiny Welles writes in "My Big Fat, Lily-White Second Life," "I almost never ran into a black person. Even in the 'urban contemporary' and Caribbean clubs, one has to search persistently for a glimpse at a suntan." She also notes being spoken to and "hit on" by other players significantly less when she started playing a black avatar rather than a white one. In the absence of in-game rewards or drawbacks to being one race or another in Second Life, players added them; they exercised their individual social preferences rather than their desire to "win" in shunning Welles. As Welles writes, "Second Life is perhaps the whitest environment I've ever experienced." Her choice of the word "environment" stresses the way that virtual space itself is shaped by racial relations. Importantly, Linden Labs continually asserts that Second Life is "not a game" but instead a "second life" and thus more real, more serious, and more responsible than other virtual worlds.

Though the only benefits that accrue to racial choice in Second Life are "aesthetic" ones (black avatars do not get, say, enhanced dancing, fighting, or athletic abilities along with their race, as occurs more or less in World of Warcraft), they must occupy a space of social interaction where race matters a great deal to other players. When players choose blackness, whiteness, or brownness they curtail the social spaces within which they can move. Thus, expanded race choices for avatars in Second Life articulate extremely closely to the racial logic of neoliberalism, "a market ideology that seeks to limit the scope and activity of governing," in this case, governance by the virtual world itself that would balance racial identity by incentivizing it (Ong 3).

Navigable space in Second Life isn't semiotically racialized by Linden Labs—the persistent shared topographies Linden supplies don't whim players over the head with Caribbean-style drum soundtracks and ambient sounds, thick Jamaican accents from NPC's (nonplayer characters), grass huts, wall hangings in earthy colors, and other strong signifiers of mythologized blackness the way World of Warcraft's Sen'jin Village does. However, Second Life's deregulation of racialized space, permitting and indeed depending upon users to create their own environments, topographies, and virtual objects, creates a sense of compositability in regard to race and racialized space that is deeply characteristic of neoliberalism. Thus, while Second Life may appear to racialize space less than does World of Warcraft, its emphasis on consumer choice (nobody is "forced" to choose a race or to occupy a particular space) highlights the ways in which users voluntarily create racialized space.

Second Life's navigable spaces exemplify the logic of neoliberalism or ungoverned "choice," while World of Warcraft composes and segments space into racialized homelands that are strongly articulated to older notions of race, particularly blackness (Trolls) and Native American-ness (Tauren). If your avatar is a Troll, having to listen to an NPC tell you in a broad Jamaican accent to "stay away from the voodoo" over the sound of drumbeats every time you buy or sell something can be a maddening experience, especially if you are an American media scholar with any sensitivity to the racialization of shared virtual space. On the other hand, if as a Troll you must endure this medi­ated immersion within a mythologized, primitive, phantasmatic racial identity and continually contend with the thoroughgoing way that Blizzard has racialized your avatar, your diegetic musical soundtrack, and your navigable space, at least you get... increased expertise with Throwing and Bow Weapons and increased Regeneration! World of Warcraft rationalizes racialized space and balances avatars' racial characteristics to ensure racial diversity. Thus, occupying racialized space, even when it is reviled as belonging to a "brutal" race such as the Orcs, has player benefits, for it is equally possible to level up or advance in-game regardless of race. There is no in-game benefit to being black, Asian, or Latino in Second Life, which is perhaps its best claim to being like "life" rather than a game.

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Mediated Spaces: Cultural Geography and the Globalization of Production

Serra Tinic

In the 1990s media studies research began to engage in a productive dialogue with larger interdisciplinary debates about the contemporary dynamics of cultural and economic globalization. The works of cultural geographer David Harvey and anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, in particular, brought questions of mobility and spatiality to the forefront of global media analyses. In an era of scholarship that increasingly questioned the “nation-state” as a stable category of cultural identification, these authors contributed to a growing lexicon from which media studies drew upon in an attempt to grapple with the contradictions and continuities that marked an acknowledgment that international no longer seemed an adequate modifier for the changing terrain of global communications practices and reception. Appadurai’s depiction of “flows” and “scapes” of people, symbolic representations, and capital (to name but a few) and Harvey’s emphasis on the transformative dimensions of global spatial politics on the community formations of local places underlined the increasing permeability of territorial borders and multidirectionality of cultural exchange and impact. Although never fully or satisfactorily articulated within these works, it seemed evident that the role of the media as both transnational corporations and cultural intermediaries should be brought to the forefront of questions of globalizing spaces at all levels, whether economic, interpretive, and/or representational.

Indeed, the media are inextricably linked to the cultural geography of globalization. The images they produce of spaces and places contribute to the global flows of people (whether as emigres or as tourists) and discursive modalities. Moreover, the media industries are increasingly mobile as changes in production and distribution practices become transnational in scope. The evolution of the transnational film and television locations industry is but one exemplar of the ways in which the media are implicated in questions of spatial competition and the representation of places. In a manner similar to other global corporations seeking economically advantageous conditions for the manufacture and distribution of their goods, Hollywood production companies are increasingly dis-located from their national centers in New York and Los Angeles as they move their projects on the road in search of cheaper labor and aesthetic realism. The establishment of Vancouver, British Columbia, as “Hollywood North” is one of the more vivid examples of the new forms of city-region competition that marks Harvey’s depiction of the struggle to control the terrain of space according to the interests of global capital. Herein, critics on both sides of the border connect the runaway locations industry with other forms of global economic outsourcing such as the flight of the automobile and information technology industries. Vancouver’s success in attracting runaway productions has led to vociferous complaints and intensive lobbying within the Los Angeles production community and labor unions in particular to “bring the industry back home.” In Canada the presence of American productions is often presented as a form of production imperialism wherein the city and province become a branch plant for L.A.-based studios and executives.

What is often lost, however, in these broader structural arguments about spatial competition are the cultural dynamics of the new creative partnerships and networks that develop at the local level. As producers increasingly work across borders they contribute to the development of interstitial media spaces and forms that epitomize—for better or worse—the term globalization. In the case of Hollywood North, resultant cross-border production partnerships have helped to somewhat revitalize the domestic industry in British Columbia while simultaneously providing entry to the American market for Canadian producers seeking access to both national media arenas. These forms of professional interaction further destabilize the concept of “national” televisual forms, as such continental relationships contribute to productions that are mutually inflected in terms of style and cultural narration.

The contemporary geography of global media production is not, however, solely driven by the economic agendas of the film and television industries. Countries around the world have come to recognize the potency of mediascapes as a means to attract the flow of tourists—and their money—in a manner that effectively reinforces Appadurai’s description of global “flows.” The power of the symbolic imaginary and the ability to firmly connect media representations to specific “places” is exemplified in the soar in tourism to New Zealand following the global success of Peter Jackson’s Lord of the Rings trilogy. The fact that a fantasy world produced primarily through digital technology could become so firmly anchored to the New Zealand landscape did not escape the notice of
international tourism boards. Consequently, countries such as Australia, South Africa, and Britain are now competing to strategically position themselves as preferred “places” for transnational locations productions. However, it is not Hollywood that they have set in their sights but rather the much larger volume production industry of Bollywood (Mumbai). The growth of the upper middle class in India has raised the hopes that a locations shot of a popular musical set in Yorkshire, Sydney, or Cape Town will eventually lead to a steady stream of charter tours. In fact, the Bollywood industry itself is purposefully targeting diasporic audiences worldwide as a means of encouragement to reinvest at “home.”

It is for these reasons that continued attention to the cultural geography or spatiality of media production and reception should be considered as central components of larger processes of economic and cultural globalization. Yet it is equally important that global media studies continues to engage with the questions posed from outside our traditional paradigms. One of the reasons that questions of space and place are such important analytical concepts is that they compel us to reconsider the fluidity of power dynamics in a transnational media environment. Although the monikers “Bollywood” and “Hollywood North” confirm or privilege the American media industries as the dominant referent, grounded analyses of the strategies deployed to exploit media “spaces” enhance our understanding of the complexity and fluidity of power in an arena of competing global production interests.

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